

**Special Forces: Creating Synergy in the Contemporary  
Operating Environment**

**A Monograph  
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## **Abstract**

Special Forces: Creating Synergy in the Contemporary Operating Environment by MAJ Glenn R. Bollinger III, United States Army, 40 pages.

An irregular enemy opposing US and partner forces in an expeditionary, nonlinear battle space defines the contemporary operating environment and post-modern warfare. This environment calls for improving our methods of operating, identifying, and building upon our strengths, and applying multiple efforts to achieve our national end state.

Does the current doctrine help Special Forces commanders facilitate the successful integration of forces, capabilities, and effects in the contemporary operating environment? General purpose forces, Special Forces, and partner nation forces must achieve some degree of interoperability in order to create synergy.

The purpose of this paper is to review the current doctrine with regard to command relationships, battlespace, and liaisons and to see if there are methods that Special Forces, partner nation forces, and general purpose forces can use to attain this all-important synergy.

This monograph will show that commanders from both general purpose forces and Special Forces are striving to attain synergy. These commanders are applying joint doctrine in a descriptive manner, focusing mission accomplishment. Special Forces commanders understand the importance of the liaison functions and are multitasking subordinate units to fulfill this need while conducting other special operations.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Special Forces: Creating Synergy in the Contemporary Operating Environment.....	1
The Integration of Special Forces & General Purpose Forces .....	14
Case Study: Operation Al Hasn.....	29
Conclusion.....	38
Bibliography .....	41

## **Special Forces: Creating Synergy in the Contemporary Operating Environment**

This is another type of war new in its intensity, ancient in its origins – war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins; war by ambush instead of combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him ... it requires in those situations where we must counter it ... a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training.

President John F. Kennedy, 1962

When the events of 9/11 impelled the U.S. government to intervene against the forces of terrorism, the first images of the American intervention were Special Forces personnel on horseback working with the Afghan irregulars of the Northern Alliance to unhinge the Taliban's military forces and administration in Afghanistan. The image of the Special Forces soldiers, with their satellite communications calling in precision air strikes in support of Tajik and Uzbek warriors, heralded the new operating environment. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld spoke at length in early 2002 about the unique qualities of these forces and their accomplishments and suggested that they embodied what warfare in the 21st century would be like.

An irregular enemy opposing US and partner forces in an expeditionary, nonlinear battle space defines the contemporary operating environment and post-modern warfare. Since those flush days early in Afghanistan the fight has expanded to other theaters and become more complex and demanding for US forces. This environment calls for improving our methods of operating, identifying, and building upon our strengths, and applying multiple efforts to achieve our national end state.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of the early success in Afghanistan and the ensuing combat environment, a second question has emerged: Does the current doctrine help Special Forces commanders

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<sup>1</sup>Hy S. Rothstein, *Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare*, forward by Seymour Hersh (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006).

facilitate the successful integration of forces, capabilities, and effects in the contemporary operating environment? General purpose forces, Special Forces, and partner nation forces must achieve some degree of interoperability in order to create synergy. This synergy is the planned and directed interaction of multiple forces so that their combined effects are greater than the sum of their individual effects.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to review the current doctrine with regard to command relationships, battlespace, and liaisons and to see if there are methods that Special Forces, partner nation forces, and general purpose forces can use to attain this all-important synergy.

Special Forces naturally gravitate toward operating through, by, and with partner nations.<sup>3</sup> These Special Forces soldiers are both trained and comfortable working with foreign militaries. Since the inception of Special Forces, the officer corps and noncommissioned officer corps have been trained to operate through surrogates, or integrating partner nations, in these allied operations. The Special Forces qualification course continues to reinforce this attribute of integration through the exercise known as Robin Sage, where students learn unconventional warfare.<sup>4</sup> This ability to successfully integrate with foreign military forces was recognized in Desert Storm when Special Forces employed as coalition support teams were the glue that held the coalition together.<sup>5</sup>

These teams provided connectivity between coalition forces and the general purpose forces which helped to synchronize operations and enhanced the capabilities of the coalition's joint forces land component commander. Special Forces can use its regional, cultural, and

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<sup>2</sup>*American Heritage Dictionary*, document on-line [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com).

<sup>3</sup>Rothstein.

<sup>4</sup>Janice Burton, "Transforming Robin Sage," *Special Operations Technology*, document online archive, 23 June 2006, vol. 4, iss. 4, <http://www.special-operations-technology.com/article.cfm?DocID=1507>, retrieved September 5, 2006.

diplomatic skills to integrate surrogate forces into the coalition thus reducing potential friction between partner nation and general purpose forces. The interaction created by Special Forces teams between the coalition forces and the general purpose forces serves to facilitate synergy into the contemporary operating environment.

Integrating Special Forces and the general purpose forces should not be difficult. They share common Army doctrine, service culture, and traditions, especially “doctrine” which is their common foundation. This doctrine is the strength that can be capitalized on in order to develop synergistic operations. Doctrine is the fundamental principle that guides the military in their actions; it is authoritative in nature, but requires judgment in application.<sup>6</sup> Using common doctrine facilitates interoperability between Special Forces and general purpose forces. Common doctrine also leads to common technical terms, or jargon. Special Forces can create (encourage) synergy by reducing potential disorder between the general purpose forces and partner nation forces during irregular warfare, by providing synchronization in both planning and execution of operations within the partner nation.

The mindset in approaching the use of doctrine is slightly different between the general purpose forces and Special Forces. Occasionally, general purpose forces approach doctrine as prescriptive, or to be followed exactly, whereas Special Forces apply this same doctrine more as a descriptive guide which allows for variations. The proper flexibility in the application of doctrine, as well as the use of common sense in application, will facilitate the much needed interoperability of general purpose forces, Special Forces, and the partner nation forces.

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<sup>5</sup>Department of Defense, News Release, No. 199-97, 24 April 1997, document online <http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=1234>.

<sup>6</sup>Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 139.



The application of integrated forces to achieve the desired effects also differs slightly between the general purpose forces and Special Forces units. The general purpose forces, with much greater combat power, are primarily focused on high intensity conflicts and prefer to employ subordinate forces in a directive manner. They prefer to maintain “ownership” of all the forces that they employ during a given operation.

Special Forces, on the other hand, employ forces in small elements and are primarily focused on low intensity conflict. Special Forces typically use surrogates to make up for their lack of mass. The use of these surrogates must be more persuasive in nature, as the partner nation forces are not “owned” by the Special Forces commander.

When working with the partner nation forces, there are several command relationships that are typically used. The partner nation forces, at times, can be under the control of the coalition joint forces land component commander. This usually occurs when the country has been invaded or in the late stages of an insurgency. An example of this would be when Kuwait was invaded in 1990.

A coalition moved to retake the country. Kuwaiti units were under direct control of the general purpose forces commander. In this case, Special Forces can facilitate the interoperability of the partner nation forces and the general purpose forces.

The partner nation political and military forces can also operate in their homeland autonomously with support from the general purpose forces. This usually occurs in the early stages of an insurgency or after stability has been accomplished. The government of the partner nation will and should desire to control its own forces as well as having some operational approval authority over the missions that are being conducted on their native soil. At this stage, Special Forces missions will shift to foreign internal defense and the units will begin to advise and assist the partner nation forces as well as synchronizing general purpose forces’ efforts with the partner nation.

At present in Afghanistan, provincial governors are seeking out the local coalition commanders and requesting the lead in operations with support from the general purpose forces. This is a good sign, and suggests that nationalist pride and trust in the capability of the Afghan National Army, as well as the Afghan National Police, is growing. When the population see that their government is planning and leading operations with minor assistance from the coalition, the civilians will be emboldened and the enemy's influence will wither without popular support. Once this occurs, the coalition will share in the decision making. Then persuasion in targeting will be necessary to attain a common goal. This process of persuasion is not a challenge for Special Forces as they have been with the Afghans from the beginning. These soldiers are learning the culture, the Afghan idiosyncrasies, and earning their trust. Special Forces can integrate these operations and create synergy in Afghanistan.

Operations require partner nation assistance to provide validity in the eyes of the local populace. The U.S. forces do not want to appear as an occupying power because the most powerful ideologies tap latent, emotive concerns of the populace, such as the desire for justice, the creation of an idealized religious state, or liberation from foreign occupation. The U.S. military conduct operations in conjunction with the desires of the partner nation government that is acting in support of its citizens, and therefore partner nation security forces must be integrated into operations. This local integration is constantly emphasized with the local civil and military leaders to ensure the partner nation forces have great visibility with the populace. Psychologically, the populace must be assured continuously and effectively that conditions are improving and that their government is responsible for the improved conditions.<sup>7</sup> When

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<sup>7</sup>Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, December 2006, 18.

commanders have the right tools for fighting an irregular war, bringing together these tools can facilitate success against an irregular opponent.

A good way to look at the integration of Special Forces, partner nation forces and general purpose forces is the method in which general purpose forces employ joint assets. General purpose forces will request a desired effect which they feel is necessary for accomplishment of their mission. To be successful, general purpose forces must have situational awareness and a detailed understanding of their current environment, the capabilities of their peers and subordinates, and what effect is needed to change that environment, thus facilitating success against an opposing force.<sup>8</sup>

Partner nation forces may need capabilities that the general purpose forces have, i.e., combat power and logistical capacity. The general purpose forces' capabilities integrated with the partner nation capabilities can facilitate success in partner nation operations. Additionally, the Special Forces are specifically suited to facilitate the integration of the partner nation security forces and the general purpose forces.

The contemporary operating environment is not always characterized by high intensity conflict; in fact, today's warfare is distinctly irregular. Irregular warfare is not officially defined by doctrine, but according to Ryan Henry the deputy secretary of defense, the current working definition is:

Irregular warfare is a form of warfare that has as its objective the credibility and/or legitimacy of the relevant political authority with the goal of undermining or supporting that authority. Irregular warfare favors indirect approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities to seek asymmetric advantages, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence and will.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Joint Forces Command, Commander's Handbook for an Effects-Based Approach to Joint Operations (24 February 2006), I-1.

Special Forces are the force of choice for operating in an irregular conflict, based on their ability to operate in a fluid environment that can leverage effects of all elements of national power, in conjunction with the goals of the partner nation.

Special Forces commanders in the contemporary operating environment may be facing challenges that are different, but these challenges are not new. What our Armed Forces are fighting is an insurgency defined by a popular movement that seeks to change the status quo through violence, subversion, propaganda, and terrorism.

This is the same as every other previous insurgency, but what is different from other insurgencies fought in the past is that modern technology has made it possible for diverse insurgent groups to network across national and international boundaries. Modern insurgency is primarily ideologically driven fundamentalists and extremists.<sup>10</sup>

What is taught about the networked enemy today is similar to what is taught in the Special Forces qualification course with regard to guerrillas, an auxiliary force, and an underground force; these forces are all global and borderless. The challenge of modern insurgencies is its global manifestation. New classes of regional and global actors have linked their movements into a global network of ideologues, financiers, document forgers, transportation experts, and propagandists. Their membership includes al Qaeda, the Hizb-I Islami Gulbuddin and other related and affiliated movements. They are a collection, or a confederation, of movements empowered by regional and global fundamental, extremist insurgents. The enemy thinks globally and acts locally.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Jason Sherman, "New Blueprint for Irregular Warfare," *Inside Defense*, (16 May 2006), available online <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,97301.00.html>.

<sup>10</sup>Lt. Gen. Wallace Gregson, "War on Terror is Inaccurate Label for War on Insurgency," *Inside Defense*, document on line, <http://www.insidedefense.com/public/navy-18-24-1.asp>.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

Detecting and defeating a network that spans the globe, while challenging, is not an impossible task. This challenge requires the mobilization of willpower and resources. All elements of national and international power must be brought to bear in order to defeat global insurgent networks. Many of the actions the U.S. Government must take in this Global War on Terror occur outside of designated combat zones and require unprecedented cooperation among interagency departments. This effort requires military units capable of coordinating the efforts of all these diverse groups and linking these coordinated efforts to the partner nation's goals.

The need for using surrogates as the operational force in irregular warfare is similar to the force multiplying process in high intensity conflict. In irregular warfare, Special Forces are particularly effective when employed in combination with indigenous forces, using the surrogates as a force multiplier. A benefit of gaining and maintaining partner nation legitimacy is that the local populace understands that it is their elected government that is operating in their interest. Special Forces can achieve the desired effects, which are nested with the partner nation as well as the general purpose forces commander. Special Forces soldiers are a force multiplier for the commander. They bring with them the intercultural and interpersonal skills vital to mission success. Special Forces can either replace or augment the capability of partner nation forces by integrating partner nation's capabilities into the general purpose forces operations.<sup>12</sup>

Falling back on the common doctrine and focusing on the result of the effect, rather than how the effect is gained, will allow commanders to integrate capabilities needed to affect successfully the enemies' environment. A commander who is efficient in the employment of a joint force will use the most effective force for a given situation, regardless of the method used in

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<sup>12</sup>Department of the Army, FM 3-05.20, *Special Forces Operations* (June 2001), 22, 25, and 37.

reaching the end state. Only the flexible application of doctrine which aims to exploit effects on the environment can fulfill the full potential of this concept.<sup>13</sup>

The foundation for any operation is doctrine, but requires flexibility in the application. This informed dexterity in the application of doctrine can ensure successful synergy for Special Forces leaders. The doctrine used to train Special Forces is the foundation for irregular warfare, but this doctrine does not offer a checklist or set procedures that will lead to success. A descriptive approach in the application of doctrine, with regard to sharing battlespace, the use of liaisons, and the integration of partner nation forces in the contemporary operating environment, will assist in achieving synergy.

Partner nations share the contemporary operational environment with coalition forces, Department of Defense, and other U.S. government elements. The capabilities these elements bring to the battlefield are essential for victory, but their effects must be synergized in order to get the full potential out of their individual talents and meet the common set of conditions that would define accomplishment of the mission. Special Forces are designed to share the operational environment, integrate forces, capabilities, and the use of partner nation forces. Special Forces' unique capability to personally interact with the partner nation forces and their technical ability to provide interoperability between the general purpose forces and the partner nation will create interoperability during the operation. Special Forces obtain synergy by ensuring that the purpose of the operation is in support of the partner nation government.

Special Forces began as a force designed to infiltrate occupied territories and work with partisans in order to facilitate success of the Allied general purpose forces against the Axis powers during World War II. Later, in Vietnam, Special Forces were used as operational-level

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<sup>13</sup>BG David Deptula, "Effects Based Operations, Changing the Nature of Warfare," *Defense and Airpower*, (Aerospace Education Foundation, 2001).

reconnaissance inserts with indigenous tribes in order to facilitate success of the general purpose forces working through the South Vietnamese government against Communist Vietnamese forces. In Desert Storm, Special Forces served as operational-level reconnaissance and as coalition support teams in order to facilitate success of the coalition general purpose force against the Iraqi forces. During Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Special Forces conducted unconventional warfare using the Northern Alliance surrogate forces to defeat the Taliban.

With the establishment of an elected government in Afghanistan, the Special Forces are conducting foreign internal defense missions to assist the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to create a safe and secure environment. This secured environment will help the government return to power and the nation to begin its recovery. With Afghanistan having been internationally recognized, it became necessary to support Afghanistan's desired end states when planning operations.

The Global War on Terror is being fought inside the confines of sovereign nation states. This challenges the geographic combatant commander's ability to manage space, as well as the ability to freely campaign against a networked enemy. Borders and boundaries force both general purpose forces and Special Forces commanders to consider the partner nation's tribal and regional boundaries during planning and operations. One method to address this challenge would be for the general purpose forces and the Special Forces to mirror the partner nation internal boundaries.

If mirroring the partner nation areas is possible, then the level of assistance and linkage of the partner nation's internal boundaries will need to be assessed. If the partner nation needs a lot of assistance, then coalition forces will be spread thin and greater levels of linkage will be required. These challenges can be overcome through the sharing of capabilities. This is only true, though, as long as flexibility in attaining the desired effect remains the method of achieving the goal. Operating within partner nation boundaries, coupled with an ill-defined front line, only

increases the requirement for synergy. While doctrine exists that addresses the sharing of battlespace, doing so is possible only in high intensity conflict, where control is both necessary and feasible.

The existing doctrinal approach, in regards to interoperability of Special Forces and the general purpose forces, is narrow. Traditionally, Special Forces affect the Joint Task Force's targets through the use of surrogates on a linear battlefield. The general purpose forces controlled the traditional deep, close, and rear areas.<sup>14</sup> In the contemporary operating environment, especially when considering irregular warfare, the "front line" is ill-defined.

Today's operating environment is a noncontiguous battlespace and targets are spread across the battlespace sporadically. Often the enemy has intermingled with the civilian populace. In Afghanistan, for example, the enemy occupies the mountainous regions while government forces control the urban areas and the majority of the western plains. There are no defined boundaries between the enemy and the friendly forces in Afghanistan.

The narrow doctrine is due to the old focus on integration during high intensity conflict and its linear battlespace not on the nonlinear battlespace of the contemporary operating environment. The contemporary operating environment is best described as nonlinear with an ill-defined enemy of primarily irregular forces. Advances in technology and doctrine have expanded the lethality, tempo, and depth of operations by reducing the sensor to shooter response time.<sup>15</sup> These advances have forced the enemy to change its method of fighting the U.S. and her allies. Originally, the battles were fought through direct force on force engagements from trench lines but have now evolved into hit and run tactics along the lines of communication.

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<sup>14</sup>Department of the Army, FM 3-0, *Operations* (June 2001), 4-25.

<sup>15</sup>"The Contemporary Operating Environment," *Strategy Page*, available on line <http://www.strategypage.com/articles/operationenduringfreedom/chap1.asp>.



Nonlinear operations emphasize simultaneous operations along multiple lines of operations from selected bases.<sup>16</sup> In such operations, joint forces orient more on their assigned objectives and less on their geographic relationship to other friendly forces. Commanders must also rely on each other for security inside shared battlespace and establish solid synchronization methods to avoid redundancy of efforts assigned to a specific effect.

In order to facilitate synergy, Special Forces and general purpose forces share the battlespace in closer proximity than in a linear construct. Special Forces elements must focus on synchronizing effects, sharing information in shaping operations, and meeting the needs of the supported commander when planning and executing operations with the general purpose forces or the partner nation forces. Individual military forces, basing their tactical decisions on the threat and the nature of the nonlinear battlespace geometry, rely more on situational awareness, mobility advantages, and freedom of action than on mass. Nonlinear operations place a premium on C4I, mobility, and innovative means for sustaining the force.<sup>17</sup>

Special Forces, working with partner nation forces, can assist the general purpose forces in a nonlinear battlespace. Tactical tasks may not be done exactly as if they were done by a U.S. general purpose force, but the effect will be the same. General purpose forces commanders will have to trust and rely on units that are not subordinate to them for assistance. Special Forces are small in number. The general purpose forces are comfortable with the higher ratio of partner nation troops and this smaller number of Special Forces who are working with the partner nation as force multipliers.

The ability to sustain a global war is affecting the Special Forces community. There are five active duty Special Forces Groups, with one assigned to each theater, and each theater has

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<sup>16</sup>Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (August 1999) 108-109.

requirements that Special Forces must attend to. The majority of this Global War on Terror has operations occurring in the Central Command area of responsibility. Central command currently requires two Special Forces Groups, along with two battalions each, to form the nucleus of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Mathematically, this requirement means that the single Special Forces Group, who has the responsibility for the Central Command area, cannot fulfill its tasking. The result is that the Special Forces Groups assigned to European Command and Southern Command are serving as Combined Joint Special Operations Task Forces within the Central command area of responsibility.

The multiple rotations into Central Command provide commanders with challenges that effect interoperability, with regard to the changing of a commander's intent and the nesting of end states from rotation to rotation. With a Special Forces Group and two battalions spanning an entire country, the manning is thin and the units are being assigned multiple tasks with technological augmentation to enhance situational awareness. The ability to man liaison positions from a slim force requires flexibility in applying current doctrine.

There are many ways to work around this issue. The question needs to be asked: How will we effectively apply from the current doctrine in an attempt to reach synergy? In future chapters, we will discuss issues that face Special Forces and general purpose forces in the topics of shared battlespace, command and control relationships, and liaisons. The goal is to find out if synergy can be obtained through the current doctrine. Is the doctrine too narrow or is it appropriate with adjustments?

We will look at operations from Operation Enduring Freedom Afghanistan, discussing the evolution of interoperability from an application perspective. The goal is to explore

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

possibilities for Special Forces to create a synergy in the environment that will allow implementation of our national end state.

## **The Integration of Special Forces & General Purpose Forces**

The nonlinear nature of operations in the contemporary operating environment (COE) presents challenges in battlespace management and the command and control that commanders will need to supervise. Military leaders must deal with the issues of integrating the capabilities of the general purpose forces (GPF) with the Special Forces (SF) and its partner nation forces. Along with this, they must include capabilities that are offered by the Department of State, Department of Justice, and other government agencies. All this must be done in order to effectively combat irregular forces. Each of these entities has the potential to operate in battle space that belongs to the partner nation.

Integration with all forces operating in the partner nation is a challenge for any commander deployed in the COE. “This integration is defined as the arrangement of military forces and their actions to create a force that operates by engaging as a whole.”<sup>18</sup> The integration, or arrangement in the battlespace, is not necessarily a power struggle; rather, it is more of a collaboration process for all parties involved with each working toward a common goal and each supporting the other in a nonlinear battlespace. Once commanders have an understanding of each others’ capabilities, they can efficiently divide tasks. Then, commanders need to agree on the environment they want to create in conjunction with the partner nation. Finally, all that is necessary is to employ the capabilities that are needed to attain the effects that will create the desired environment. Using one of the principals of war, the unity of command prevents wasted

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<sup>18</sup>Joint Publication 1-02, 218.

efforts in facilitating efficiency. Since someone has to be in charge, command relationships will be the first doctrinal avenue towards synergy.

Synergy among military forces can be obtained through an improved application of command relationships. Command relationships are defined as the interrelated responsibilities between commanders, as well as the operational authority exercised by commanders in the chain of command; which is defined further as combatant command authority (COCOM), operational control (OPCON), tactical control (TACON), or support.<sup>19</sup> These command relationships should be descriptive in nature and offer the most advantageous use of capabilities to gain the desired effects

The sharing of space in a nonlinear environment, the coordination and de-confliction of operations, as well as force protection, can result in reducing the enemy's ability to operate between organizations. The proper coordination of operations and the use of partner nation forces as surrogates are linked through SF liaisons. This will increase the success of combating an irregular force. The de-confliction of operations will reduce potential redundancy of assets assigned to specific effects.

Establishing a well-defined unity of command and the use of doctrinal terminology is important and can clear up initial questions for GPF commanders and their staffs. When establishing unity of command, general purpose forces should distinguish between the Army command relationships and joint command relationships. Depending on the level of integration, the general purpose forces unit may be operating under Army doctrine. The Special Forces currently deployed in the contemporary operating environment, regardless of level, will normally be operating under joint doctrine.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 87.

General purpose forces commanders and their staffs must understand that the Special Forces, who are deployed in the COE, operate as part of a joint headquarters. Even though SF units are also Army units, they are usually deployed as joint headquarters. The Theater Special Operations Commander (TSOC) has OPCON over the special operations forces that are in theater.

Army units at the operational and tactical levels will employ units as part of the Coalition Joint Force Land Component Command (CJFLCC) with attached Sister Service and interagency elements. ARFOR units assigned to the CJFLCC will use Army doctrine as its foundation.

The Joint Dictionary contains all the terms as well as the definitions from each sister service. However, the Army's Field Manual (FM) only covers Army specific terms and definitions. Because it is an Army this is not a flaw, but the staff must be prepared to incorporate joint terminology into their plan. Since joint terminology has primacy, it should not be a difficult leap to transition back and forth between the command relationships.

Joint terminology is general in nature. Technical or highly specialized terms may be included if they can be defined in easily understood language and if their inclusion is of general military or associated significance.<sup>20</sup> Terminology that is specific to a service or is inadequate for all services to use is left to service specific doctrine. With regard to command relationships from a joint perspective, they are written broadly with responsibilities identified and requirements, as well as capabilities, applied to accomplish set tasks.

Army relationships tend to be more specific in nature. The breadth of a ground specific operation is not as great as in a joint operation. The depth necessary for a commander to employ a joint force does not need to be as detailed, he need only understand the capability and effect

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<sup>20</sup>Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, ii, and FM 1-02 (FM 101-5-1) MCRP 5-12A *Operational Terms and Graphics*, vii.

desired to employ a variety of joint forces. This control will not be the same when using joint forces as it is when employing like forces.

In Afghanistan today, the Coalition Joint Forces Land Component commander has operational control over a Special Forces Group (SFG). The SFG is serving as a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF). This command relationship has proven to be successful, although it did not happen over night. Commanders had to work through the process and learn how to best organize in order to optimize each others strengths and limitations. An example will be discussed in the case study of Al Hasn.

Supported commander: The commander having primary responsibility for all aspects of a task assigned by the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan or other joint operation planning authority. In the context of joint operation planning, this term refers to the commander who prepares operation plans or operation orders in response to requirements of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In the context of a support command relationship, the commander who receives assistance from another commander's force or capabilities, and who is responsible for ensuring that the supporting commander understands the assistance required. See also support; supporting commander.<sup>21</sup>

A supported commander is a joint term that places responsibility for a specific task on a given commander. The supported commander is responsible for all aspects of a task assigned by the planning authority. The supported commander is the commander that prepares the plans or orders in response to the requirements from his higher commander. The supported commander is also the one who receives assistance or capabilities from other forces.<sup>22</sup> The key word to this definition is responsibility; the supported commander is the one responsible for accomplishing the assigned task.

The case study on Operation Al Hasn will give an example of the Special Forces serving as the supported commander while the general purpose forces operated as the supporting element.

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<sup>21</sup>Joint Publication 1-02, 425.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

When the Afghan National Army, aided by CJSOTF soldiers, conducted an offensive in the Tagrab Valley, the general purpose forces served in the operation as the supporting commander. This supporting force offered security for the aide organizations that followed as part of civil military operations.

Supporting commander is a commander who provides augmentation forces or other support to a supported commander or who develops a supporting plan. This includes the designated combatant commands and Defense agencies as appropriate. In the context of a support command relationship, the commander who aids, protects, complements, or sustains another commander's force, and who is responsible for providing the assistance required by the supported commander. See also support; supported commander.<sup>23</sup>

The supporting commander identifies a force or capability recognized and requested by the supported commander in order to achieve the desired effect on the environment. A supporting commander provides forces, or capabilities, for an assigned task in order to meet the supported commander's desired effect. Supporting commanders facilitate the accomplishment of missions by assisting the supported command (who is responsible for completing the assigned task) through the use of their organization's specific capabilities.

The Army approaches command relationships with COCOM, OPCON, and TACON similar to the approach used in joint terminology. It is important to understand that these terms are defined in the Army doctrine and are also addressed in the joint dictionary. However, the supported and supporting commanders are approached differently, or not at all, in the Army command relationships. This confusion is based on the fact that supporting and supported relationships in the Army are often developed in regard to field artillery and other combat support units (Military Intelligence, Transportation Corps, or Signal Corps units).

Combatant command (command authority) — Nontransferable command authority established by title 10 ("Armed Forces"), United States Code, section 164, exercised only by commanders of unified or specified combatant commands unless otherwise directed

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 426.

by the President or the Secretary of Defense. Combatant command (command authority) cannot be delegated and is the authority of a combatant commander to perform those functions of command over assigned forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations, joint training, and logistics necessary to accomplish the missions assigned to the command. Combatant command (command authority) should be exercised through the commanders of subordinate organizations. Normally this authority is exercised through subordinate joint force commanders and Service and/or functional component commanders. Combatant command (command authority) provides full authority to organize and employ commands and forces as the combatant commander considers necessary to accomplish assigned missions. Operational control is inherent in combatant command (command authority).<sup>24</sup>

COCOM assigns full authority to organize and employ commands and their forces to accomplish assigned missions. This authority is exercised through subordinate commands. Only the geographic combatant commander may exercise this authority over forces operating in their assigned areas of responsibility because the combatant command cannot be delegated to subordinate or lateral commanders.<sup>25</sup>

Operational control — Command authority that may be exercised by commanders at any echelon at or below the level of combatant command. Operational control is inherent in combatant command (command authority) and may be delegated within the command. When forces are transferred between combatant commands, the command relationship the gaining commander will exercise (and the losing commander will relinquish) over these forces must be specified by the Secretary of Defense. Operational control is the authority to perform those functions of command over subordinate forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction necessary to accomplish the mission. Operational control includes authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations and joint training necessary to accomplish missions assigned to the command.

Operational control should be exercised through the commanders of subordinate organizations. Normally this authority is exercised through subordinate joint force commanders and Service and/or functional component commanders. Operational control normally provides full authority to organize commands and forces and to employ those forces as the commander in operational control considers necessary to accomplish assigned missions; it does not, in and of itself, include authoritative direction for logistics or matters of administration, discipline, internal organization, or unit training.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 322.



OPCON, is the authority to perform those functions of command that involve organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction necessary to accomplish the mission. Unlike Combatant Command, OPCON authority can be delegated or transferred. Army commanders use it routinely to task and organize the forces.<sup>27</sup> OPCON may be described as the parent command. In order to accomplish a given task, the OPCON, or parent command, may employ or transfer an Army brigade of any of the Special Forces subordinate battalions to another command that requires the capabilities necessary to accomplish the assigned task.

Operation Anaconda is an example of an operation with loose command and control relationships when the general purpose forces obtaining OPCON/TACON of Special Forces. The 5th SFG commander requested that TSOC place his CJSOTF OPCON to the 10th Mountain Division Commander. The reasoning behind this request was to alleviate the potential friction that can occur when two commanders of the same rank are conducting the same operation. The operation contained both 5th SFG as well as a brigade from the 101st Air Assault Division. Even though the units had worked together in the past, the size of the operation was too large and offered potential friction between the two commanders.<sup>28</sup> Even though The TSOC transferred TACON there were still several special operations forces that were not under direct control of the 10th Mountain Division.

Tactical control: Command authority over assigned or attached forces or commands, or military capability or forces made available for tasking, that is limited to the detailed direction and control of movements or maneuvers within the operational area necessary to accomplish missions or tasks assigned. Tactical control is inherent in operational control. Tactical control may be delegated to, and exercised at any level at or below the

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Sean Naylor, *Not A Good Day To Die, The Untold Story Of Operation Anaconda* (New York: Berkley Caliber Books), 2005, 68, 82-95.

level of combatant command. When forces are transferred between combatant commands, the command relationship the gaining commander will exercise (and the losing commander will relinquish) over these forces must be specified by the Secretary of Defense. Tactical control provides sufficient authority for controlling and directing the application of force or tactical use of combat support assets within the assigned mission or task.<sup>29</sup>

TACON is normally limited to the accomplishment of a specific task. It allows commanders to apply force and direct the tactical use of assets that have been made available for the tasking, but TACON does not provide authority to change organizational structure or to direct administrative or logistic support. The commander of the parent unit continues to exercise those responsibilities unless otherwise specified in the establishing directive. The best way to envision this is to think of TACON as an element from one organization which is being assigned to another command for a specific mission. This command relationship is similar but not identical to the supported commander in Joint terminology.<sup>30</sup>

The case study on Operation Al Hassan will give a specific example of Special Forces obtaining TACON of general purpose forces to conduct cordons isolating the valley and preventing the enemy from evading the Afghan forces that were being assisted by units from the CJSOTF.

Operation Anaconda provides an example of Special Forces serving as the supporting element while general purpose forces operated as a supported command. The 10th Mountain Division employed both a brigade from the 101st and the 5th Special Forces Group in the Shawicote valley to seize an enemy base area and capture high value targets. The 10th Mountain

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<sup>29</sup>Joint Publication 1-02, 433.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

Division's commanding general was the supported commander and the brigade and the group were TACON while other Special Operations forces were in a supporting role.<sup>31</sup>

The Army compartmentalizes support relationships into four categories. Support relationships in the Army establish specific responsibilities between supporting and supported units. Army support relationships are direct support (DS), general support (GS), general support reinforcing (GSR), and reinforcing (R). DS, GS, GSR, & R Army terms are not very applicable to Special Forces employment on the battle field. They were designed for use by logistics, intelligence and artillery units. However, joint doctrine views support as a mission not a relationship, and in that aspect, they are very suitable for Special Forces units when it is deemed that the effect necessary can be provided by Special Forces units.

Direct support is a support relationship requiring one force to support another and authorizing the supporting unit to answer directly to the supported commander's request for assistance. A unit that is assigned a direct support relationship retains its command relationship with its parent unit but is positioned by and has priorities of support that are established by the supported unit. A supporting unit in direct support would be positioned in the battlespace by the supported unit and responds to calls for assistance without having to coordinate with the parent command. Direct support is probably closest to the joint definition of a supporting commander.<sup>32</sup>

General support is a support relationship that requires a unit to support a force as a whole rather than responding to any particular unit. Forces assigned a general support relationship are positioned and have priorities established by their parent unit. A unit in general support continues its day-to-day mission but provides assistance to other units when directed by its parent

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<sup>31</sup>Naylor, 68, 82-95.

<sup>32</sup>FM 1-02 (FM 101-5-1) MCRP 5-12A, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, 1-61.

commander.<sup>33</sup> Since it is not feasible for a general purpose force commander to understand the nuances of SF operations, coupled with the fact that Special Forces are currently deployed as joint headquarters, the joint concepts of supporting and supported is more effective when attempting to describe command relationships for Special Forces. Commanders need only understand each other's capabilities and the effects desired to operate against an irregular opponent.

Historically, the apportionment of battlespace was separated through the use of joint operational areas. This system worked well in a linear construct of the battlefield; however, it did not allow the fluidity that is required in today's contemporary operating environment.<sup>34</sup>

Doctrinally, a joint operational area is an area of land, sea, and airspace defined by a geographic combatant commander or subordinate unified commander in which a joint force conducts military operations to accomplish a specific mission.<sup>35</sup> This would be a way that the commander apportions battlespace to his joint task forces in order to enhance and facilitate operations.

The terrain temporarily apportioned to a SF commander, who is serving as a CJSOTF, can be a joint special operations area (JSOA). A JSOA is a restricted area of some combination of land, sea, and air in which to conduct special operations activities. It may be limited in size to accommodate a discrete direct action mission, or it may be extensive enough to allow a broad range of continuing unconventional warfare operations.<sup>36</sup>

The use of JSOA is not nearly as frequent or relevant in a nonlinear battlespace. In the past, for example, during Desert Storm, a JSOA would commonly be used as a protective barrier used to prevent fratricide or to facilitate operational security requirements. While today these

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 1-88.

<sup>34</sup>JP 3-0, II-15-II-19, JP 3-33

<sup>35</sup>Joint Publication 1-02, 239.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 1-02, 242.

operational areas, by definition, are temporary and relatively exclusive in the current operational use, they may only be necessary for missions in regard to a high value target or other special operations missions. In Afghanistan, a SF unit, when deployed as a CJSOTF, will share battlespace with general purpose forces, NATO forces, and the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police. The challenges in supporting and maintaining the special operations forces across large battle space are greater than an organic SFG can cover. The same thought applies to the joint operational areas. This is why a CJSOTF will rely on the CJFLCC. Their help is needed to assist with the logistical support.

Difficulties in command and control as well as battlespace management will benefit the enemy if Special Forces and general purpose forces cannot share battle space or travel from one target to another based on exploited information in a previously occupied sector. Proper coordination and procedures must be completed as a force protection measure and must provide general situational awareness to all military and paramilitary forces on the ground. If these issues are not addressed, the enemy will gain freedom of movement and our military forces will not be able to capitalize on our improved situational awareness. Information without the ability to act is useful, but this same information is irrelevant if the enemy has the ability to flee.

Coordination and the sharing of information can be enhanced through proper use of liaisons. Liaison teams or individuals may be dispatched from higher to lower, lower to higher, laterally, or any combination of these. Liaisons generally represent the interests of the sending commander to the receiving commander. They can promote understanding of each commander's intent from both the sending and receiving headquarters and should be assigned early in the planning stage of joint operations. Liaisons from supporting to supported commanders are

particularly essential in ascertaining needs and coordinating supporting actions.<sup>37</sup> Liaisons can coordinate operations prior to execution, which ensures that the commanders in the local area are aware of operations in or around their own area of responsibility. Liaisons can also preplan support efforts with their neighbors based on the strengths and limitations of the various units conducting the operation. An effective liaison can also have neighboring units, even though they are not directly involved in a particular operation, to be prepared in the event that information gathered from an adjacent operation leads to a high value target in their area of responsibility.

With regard to liaison elements, they are primarily used in an information management function. However, Special Forces manning shortfalls and high operational tempo make it difficult for CJSOTF to provide a liaison to each GPF, partner nation, or coalition unit operating in the same battle space. SF leadership at the tactical level must also perform liaison functions while conducting special operations.

Effective liaisons are critical to success; as they assist SF commanders in synchronizing special operations with GPF operations. Special Forces typically provide two types of liaison organizations: a Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE) or a Special Forces Liaison Element (SFLE). Mission requirements determine which organization is employed and in the manning of each.

When Special Forces conduct missions that support the general purpose forces or operate within a joint area of operation, the TSOC or the CJSOTF commander sends a SOCCE to co-locate with the general purpose forces headquarters. The SOCCE performs essential command and control functions during the conduct of special operations.<sup>38</sup> Those functions include

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<sup>37</sup>Joint Pub 3-0, III-9.

<sup>38</sup>Department of the Army, FM 3-50.20, *Special Forces Operations* (26 June 2001), 4-10.

synchronizing special operations and partner nation forces' operations with the GPF as well as coordinating special operations with the CJSOTF.

Current SF doctrine describes the most common liaison element as a SOCCE. It is the focal point for synchronizing Special Forces' activities with general purpose force operations. It performs command and control or liaison functions (but not both) according to the mission's requirements and as directed by the establishing SF commander. Its level of authority and responsibility may vary widely. It normally co-locates with the headquarters element of a GPF brigade or division. The SOCCE can also receive special operations forces' operational, intelligence, and target acquisition reports directly from deployed joint special operations forces. An example of this can be seen when NAVSPECWAR (SEALS) elements provide intelligence to the supported component headquarters. The SOCCE remains under the operational control of the joint force special operations component (JFSOCC) commander or commander of the CJSOTF.<sup>39</sup> When given the task of coordinating responsibility by the CJSOTF commander, the SOCCE can act as a conduit of information or it can exercise command and control of Special Forces elements that are operating in the same battle space as the general purpose forces.

The mission of an SF Company acting as a SOCCE is to synchronize operations between Special Forces and general purpose forces. For this synchronization to occur, continuous communications must be established and maintained between the CJSOTF and the GPF headquarters through the SOCCE. Because the SOCCE retains operational control of its subordinate Special Forces Operational Detachment Alphas (SFODA), it is required to synchronize operations and effects with the GPF headquarters it is assigned to in order to ensure that the special operations are nested in their purpose and end state.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., B-2.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 4-6.

In summary, the SOCCE is the best example of how current advanced operating base (AOB) operations have taken on the liaison task while continuing to provide command and control for its subordinate SFODAs. Again, doctrine states that a SFODB will act as either an AOB or SOCCE and that the SOCCE will be a liaison with coordinating capability through which the SOF higher headquarters will command. However, currently in Afghanistan, it is more common for an AOB to be required to do both liaison and provide command and control, without additional manpower, due to the constraints and personnel limitations in the COE. An example of how the flexibility in applying the doctrine is being effective through necessity can be seen today in Afghanistan. The SFODB headquarters are executing both the tasks assigned to a SOCCE as well as the task to an AOB.

A Special Forces Liaison Element (SFLE), typically built around an SFODA, provides liaison between U.S. general purpose forces and partner nation units when it is required. A SFLE has no command and control authority. It is only a liaison element to facilitate effective multi-national operations and interoperability.

How the SFLE ensures adequate interoperability depends on a variety of factors such as the mission, partner nation capabilities, resources, and time. A SFLE may provide secure communication linkages to American general purpose forces, or they might assist overcoming language or cultural barriers. As you can see, operating with partner nation forces, the SFLE may also be referred to as a coalition support team.<sup>41</sup>

Accompanying SFLE's advice, their foreign counterparts on U.S. military intentions and capabilities provide training, provide access to technology, and secure communications between the GPF and coalition forces. The SFLE also confirm the situation on the ground, assist in fire support planning, and enable overall coordination between the GPF, the coalition forces and the



partner nation forces.<sup>42</sup> This responsibility cannot be taken lightly as the coordination of movement and operations are force protection matters that can prevent fratricide.

There are benefits to the SFLE helping coordinate operations. They contribute to the desired synergy by integrating the coalition forces in a supporting role. A SFODA acting as a SFLE is still operating under the control of its parent headquarters. As a force coordinator it, ensures integration and synchronization of the general purpose forces and the coalition forces.

In order to address manpower and operational tempo challenges in 2002, the Commander of United States Army Special Forces Command decided that the liaison elements attached to the GPF would use a new method. SF units would deploy to theater and employ themselves in as Army Special Operations Task Force (a Special Forces Battalion), AOB (a Special Forces Company) and SFODA (a 12 man team) configurations. Each of these SFODAs would be capable of executing the Special Forces' core tasks with the additional task of integration.

It is now an inherent responsibility of the SF commander to act as the link between the senior special operations commander and the GPF commander's operations. More and more, SF units are demonstrating that they use flexibility within the current doctrine and succeed in synchronizing and conducting operations. It simply doesn't make sense to have SF elements deployed in GPF areas as purely liaisons if they can do the job of commanding and controlling subordinates while safeguarding and supplying the Special Forces operational detachment alphas. While SF units are sharing forward operating bases with general purpose forces, friction may occur between personalities that are accustomed to control and with personalities that are used to operating with fewer restrictions. Special Forces must remember that one of the goals of their operations is to facilitate synergy, which is the interaction of multiple coalition forces, so that

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<sup>41</sup>Department of the Army, FM 100-25, *Doctrine for Special Operation Forces* (August 1999) 4-6.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 2-21.

their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects.<sup>43</sup> This requires keeping all operations focused on the partner nation and providing any assistance necessary to enhance their success. The partner nation is the deciding factor in operations and the general purpose forces have mass. The Special Forces must be the conduit making synergy possible.

## **Case Study: Operation Al Hasn**

During the fall offensive of 2005, military forces from Special Operations Forces (SOF), general purpose forces (GPF), as well as elements from the coalition forces (CF) conducted integrated operations in the Tagab Valley. (The Tagab Valley is located in the southeastern corner of the Kapisa Province, in Central Afghanistan.) The operation forced the Taliban to retreat across the border into nearby Pakistan. Once the Taliban had been defeated in the Tagab Valley, the military forces were relocated to other Provinces in Afghanistan and the valley was left undefended.

The Kapisa province is one of the thirty four provinces in Afghanistan. The province is approximately 1842 square kilometers in size which is slightly smaller than the training area of the National Training Center in Fort Irwin California. There are approximately 369,200 people living in the Kapisa province they are primarily Pashtun and speak Pashto as well as Farsi Dari. The economy of the Kapisa province is based on agriculture and weekly trade in the markets.

One year later, approximately 500 Taliban returned from Pakistan and regained control of the Tagab Valley. At this same time, Humanitarian Assistance (HA) made drops of blankets and winter clothing into the southern portion of the Valley by the Taliban. Unfortunately, these lifesaving items were symbolically burned only weeks before the cold winter months. In the

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<sup>43</sup>American Heritage Dictionary.

Kohi Safi Mountains, which separate the Tagab Valley from Bagram Airfield, the Taliban had weapons caches as well as fortified fighting positions for operations that would be held against the Coalition Forces. Also located in the Tagab Valley were at least three suicide bomber training facilities.

The Taliban had established a series of pre-planned ambush sites to harass the Coalition convoys that were passing through the Valley. The Tagab Valley, running 40 kilometers north to south only 60 miles northeast of Kabul, was an ideal safe-haven from which Taliban commanders could project insurgent activity into the nearby provinces. A safe and secure Tagab Valley would clearly have significant effects on the security of central Afghanistan.

The military and the political leaders of Afghanistan reviewed previous operations and identified some areas that required improvement. They understood that long-term success in the Tagab Valley would come from a fully synergized operation which would maximize the capabilities of military forces, security forces, the local government, and non-governmental organizations that would aide the people of the Province. The Special Operations Task Force 33 (SOTF-33) from the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) and Task Force 8 (TF-8) from the United Arab Emirates worked hand in hand with the government of Afghanistan to plan and execute the operation into the valley. The purpose of the operation was to bring long-term stability to the Tagab Valley.

The TF 8 commander named the operation “Al Hasn”, which is Arabic for “fortress”, as the operation would clearly be a siege against the Taliban’s operational bases. Operation Al Hasn would be a series of joint, multi-national, multi-agency, sequential use of maneuvers which were designed to clear, hold, and build Coalition support in the Tagab Valley against the Taliban forces. The military end state would be to gain and maintain a secure and stabilized Kapisa Province.

The operation featured over a thousand Afghan National Security Forces, two Infantry Companies from the Afghanistan National Army, two Companies from TF-8, four SFODAs, as well as personnel from the FBI and other government agencies. CJTF 76 provided rotary wing aviation for air-lifts as well as for fire support. Armored vehicles were used for convoy security and fixed wing aircraft from the air component commander were used for Close Air Support (CAS). The planning and employment of these assets would fall onto the shoulders of the commander of SOTF 3-3. Fortunately, he would have a strong partner in the Governor of Kapisa.

All non-Afghan elements conducting the operation would operate under the command and control of SOTF-33 as the supported commander. The SOTF-33 commander worked in parallel with the Governor of the Kapisa province, who controlled the bulk of the Afghan security forces. Once the Afghan forces were linked with the CJSOTF forces, the next step would be to get the Governor's local subordinates involved in the planning process.

Working towards the goal of gaining and maintaining a secure and stabilized Kapisa Province would first require denying safe haven to the Taliban. SOTF-33 and TF-8 began to create a friendly network to degrade the Taliban network in the Valley. This required the identification of key friendly Afghan personalities with whom SOTF-33 and TF-8 could build their alliance. SOTF-33 and TF-8 understood that the key to success for long-term stability in the Kapisa Province was to empower the Afghan officials in the Province to take ownership of the operations.

The commander of TF-8, being an Arab with similar Islamic cultural norms, was able to streamline financial support procedures from his government and had the unique ability to build almost instant rapport with local Afghani leaders. TF -8's commander had developed a relationship with the Satar Murad, the Governor of Kapisa, and recommended that he be brought into the process to discuss the future of the Valley. In September 2006, the military commanders,

as well as Governor Murad,, met at the TF-8 compound to discuss the future security of the Tagab Valley.

From the very first planning session, Governor Murad and the SOF commanders agreed that bringing stability to Tagab was not exclusively a military matter. Instead, this was a battle that must be won by the local legitimate government. Long-term success in the Tagab Valley required tangible demonstrations of the Afghan government's commitment to security and stability in the region. The Government of Afghanistan (GOA) would do more than provide symbolic ownership; the GOA would bear the leadership mantle for this operation.

The military leadership and the regional Afghan officials began to plan an operation to clear the insurgents from the Valley, create a lasting security posture, and build legitimate government structures capable of combating an insurgent threat over the long-term. Challenges did exist. For example, the U.S. planners had to follow a tight and efficient planning process. Elements of the planning that might take minutes for a U.S. staff to accomplish took significantly longer when the collective staffs and Afghan leaders could be gathered. Moreover, the GOA leaders had to divide their attentions between operational planning and their governing duties. Despite these challenges, the Afghan partners now had ownership of the process and were treated as equal partners in shaping the plan according to their priorities. A partnership between Coalition Forces and the Government of Afghanistan, forged during Operation Al Hasn, had the goal of setting conditions for the Kapisa government to separate the local populace from the insurgent fighters.

During the planning process, both the SOF and Afghan Planners identified the need to balance the kinetic operations with non-kinetic operations. The planners developed sequential operations that started with kinetic operations and were followed closely with non-kinetic supporting operations (by phase). This sequencing allowed the GOA to quickly repair any collateral damage caused by kinetic operations. This design also allowed the Afghan officials to

gain the confidence of the local people. As soon as the Taliban were driven out of a particular area, the GOA would replace that void with a program designed to improve the local villagers' way of life with civil military operations and aide received from the NGOs.

The timing of these actions would be critical to the success of the operation, so the planners decided to preposition logistical supplies in advance. These supplies would be stored in either bulk at small bases or loaded onto convoys that would move into an area as soon as the fighting had subsided. These convoys would have 'security' that would be provided by general purpose forces as well as by Afghan police forces. The relief efforts would be directed by the local village leadership in conjunction with the NGOs. This planning and pre-positioning of logistical support began thirty days prior to the execution of the operation that was to be carried out in Al Hasn.

The pre-positioning of supplies was required so that Medical Civil Action Programs (MEDCAP could be supported over a short period without delay for re-supplying. Significant planning had to occur to ensure such a large series of MEDCAP would be feasible. It took over a month to assemble the robust medical package that consisted of personnel from the United States, Unites Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, Romania, and Korea. Just as in the preparation for kinetic operations, these MEDCAP required rehearsals and refresher training. The MEDCAP also expanded its normal duties to include the treatment of women, children, and even included a veterinary package to treat pets and livestock. CA planners, as well as a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) from Bagram, also planned and rehearsed security issues with the Afghan security forces that would be providing both internal and external security as well as a workable patient management system that would maximize the number of people who could receive care. This package was prepared to move forward days in advance, and it actually entered the Valley only hours after the initial phases of the kinetic operations.

During the planning, the Governor of Kapisa and his intelligence chiefs were found to be excellent sources of information in identifying key enemy locations, key players, and discussing unique environmental and political challenges in the Tagab to the SOF planners. The local Afghan leadership drove the targeting process with their unique knowledge of the environment. Their unparalleled insight into the region gave Operation Al Hasn precise targeting information that would reduce the risk of collateral damage and allow the coalition to maximize the effectiveness of its reconstruction efforts. The transfer of information went by message traffic through the CJSOTF and straight to CJTF 76, as there were no additional personnel in SOTF 3-3 to spare for liaison positions.

Once the planning was completed, it was necessary to synchronize all the elements through a series of rehearsals in preparation for the kinetic operations. TF-8 had been selected to conduct an air assault with an SFODA as their counterpart. The CJTF 76 provided TF Centaur (a GPF aviation battalion) as a supporting effort to SOTF 3-3. The SFODA that had been partnered with TF-8 served as the LNO which linked all the activities of the air assault with the GPF. Since these elements had not worked together in the past, it was necessary to rehearse loading and offloading as well as to conduct a full mission profile. This profile included a ‘fly away’ rehearsal mission to mock up the objectives that would be similar in the distance of the mission as well as complexity of the mission.

Other ODAs tasked with blocking or clearing positions during Al Hasn rehearsed the tasks in detail as well as in contingency with their Afghan partners. Each element of the kinetic operation had planned and rehearsed key phases of its operations for over three solid weeks. Operation Al Hasn started with the night air assault against a known Taliban leader in the north of the Valley. This mission was conducted by TF-8, its partner SFODA along with an attached FBI element, and a USAF dog team. The airlift, as well as CAS support, was provided by TF Centaur and JFACC assets. The air assault cleared Taliban insurgents from their positions and established

a security presence in the Valley. To ensure the enemy could not flee, as it had done in the past, ANSF and two ODAs would seal the southern end of the Valley. The air assault and blocking positions were successful and, with the enemy now caught in the valley, the TF-8 made a 'fix' on them and the SFODA called in AH-64s and AC-130 gun ships for close air support (CAS) in order to destroy the Taliban who were attempting to flee from the air assault objective.

As this air assault began, the first of many logistical convoys prepared to move from Bagram Airfield towards the Tagab under the cover of darkness. This convoy included not only the HA, MEDCAP, and logistics necessary for sustained operations, but it also included the armored vehicles that would be delivered to the air assault element once they had secured their initial objective. A company of ANA and an ODA met the logistical convoy when it arrived at the new Tagab Firebase. The ANA, the ODA, and a portion of the logistical convoy moved from the firebase by ground convoy in order to link-up with the TF-8 air assault element with the TF-8 vehicles.

On the first morning of the operation, as the Afghan, US, and UAE forces began clearing the Taliban insurgents from the Valley, the SOF commanders and Governor Murad moved the tactical operations center (TOC) into the northern part of the Tagab Valley. The Governor stayed at the TOC to plan and direct operations for the entire eleven days of the operation. Since the Governor co-located with the SOF commanders, the ability to synergize operations was easier. The Governor of Kapisa did not require a liaison team to link his efforts to the coalition; he was also able to communicate with his subordinate leaders by using the TOC's communication package and relay orders between SFODAs and partner nation forces. Governor Murad was also able to broadcast his message to his constituents by using PSYOP equipment. Due to thorough PSYOP preparations, factual information from the Governor of Kapisa was published by the Afghan national media on the very same day. As a result, the Taliban's misinformation campaign stopped within the first few days of the operation.



The Afghan security forces and two SFODAs in the southern part of the valley began maneuvering north toward the center of the valley. CAS from JFACC elements, as well as from TF Centaur was essential since the enemy's counterattacks increased in intensity the further north the element moved. Simultaneously, in an attempt to force a pincer effect, the two ODAs, TF-8 and their partnered ANP, from the previous night's air assault, pushed south toward Tagab Village.

By the 5th day of operations, all efforts turned east against the remaining Taliban who were located on the eastern wall of the Tagab Valley. The Taliban in the Bedrab Valley were isolated but were putting up a fierce fight. Based on information from the Governor's intelligence network, TF-8 and their partnered ODA established a blocking position along the traditional escape and the ingress routes of insurgents fleeing the Bedrab Valley to the East. By dusk, the ANSF and their ODA partners had sealed the southern and northern escape routes out of the Valley. At the same time, another ODA established a blocking position on the approach route out of Bedrab Valley to the west.

As the offensive operations maneuvered into the central portion of the valley, the Governor gathered his influential local leaders in order to gain their assistance in the military efforts. The local Mullahs were asked to separate the Taliban from the civilians in each of their villages. Governor Murad explained to the mullahs that (as each village was determined to be safe) the MEDCAP and aide workers would enter and begin assisting their people. Within 24 hours of the message being delivered to the mullahs, seven MEDCAP started into the Tagab valley. Throughout the Valley, almost 4200 patients were seen in the first two weeks of the Operation.

With eight days of continuous combat operations, the maneuvering units began to require re-supply. The JFACC and TF Centaur provided CAS and constant re-supply by either the rotary wing or the containerized delivery system (CDS). Every night during that first week of

operations, Air Force MC-130 aircraft conducted CDS drops for the maneuver units. In addition, TF Centaur conducted five emergency re-supplies of ammunition and water by rotary wing assets.

The transition from offense to stability operations was working and the SOTF PSYOP were facilitating the Governor in getting his message out to the populace by prerecording messages on CDs and delivering them to the local radio stations. The JFACC provided support by continuing to drop radios ahead of the operations in order to keep the local people informed of impending operations. The information to the local Afghans was coming from their elected leader and that the coalition efforts were in place only to support him.

One week after the kinetic operations began, SOTF-33 PSYOPS continued to provide messages to the Voice of Kapisa radio station. These messages would be broadcast for ten minutes every hour of every evening during the operation. The future of the Tagab Valley was the main content of these broadcasts. The SOTF 33 logistics teams built a permanent firebase in the northern part of the Tagab Valley. This firebase would serve as the new home for an ODA and a company of ANA soldiers. These soldiers would provide a lasting security presence in the Tagab Valley.

Combined Joint Task Force -76 (CJTF-76) provided millions of dollars in funding to the Commander's Emergency Relief Program that was designated specifically to rebuild the Tagab Valley's infrastructure. Representatives of United States Agency for International Development developed a strategy with the Provincial Reconstruction Team, the Kapisa government, and the Coalition to establish long-term infrastructure development projects.

Governor Murad held a press conference during the final days of the operation in which he emphasized the partnership with the Coalition in both security and development. A permanent structure is presently under construction at the new Tagab firebase to facilitate meetings between the Coalition and the ANSF. An ANP and National Defense Service liaison will permanently be

stationed at the firebase in order to maintain the constant partnership between the Kapisa Government and the Coalition forces.

SOTF-33 and TF-8 are now turning their focus toward the development of the Tagab Valley's infrastructure and civil society to maintain the momentum and long term strategic effects that Operation Al Hasn was meant to deliver. The primary objective in the Tagab Valley continues to be the maintenance of stability and strengthening the rapport amongst the local populace along with discouraging insurgent elements from returning in force. Since Operation Al Hasn ended on 11 November, there has been little enemy activity in the Tagab Valley, and the insurgent related violence in nearby Kabul is almost non-existent. Because of this lasting success and fruitful partnership, Operation Al Hasn has become a template for COIN operations in Afghanistan. Success against an insurgency demands that the time, place, and conditions are set in order to establish long-term stability for the legitimate government.<sup>44</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Does doctrine enable Special Forces commanders to facilitate the ability to successfully integrate forces, capabilities, and effects into the contemporary operating environment? Synergy is the interaction of multiple coalition forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects. Synergy is important in the general purpose forces as well as in the Special Forces. Commanders are working to combine their effects in Afghanistan. Both elements are taking a descriptive approach towards the application of doctrine. This approach is allowing for flexibility which then allows commanders to focus on the achieved effect rather than the method used to attain this effect. Command relationships OPCON and TACON typically

remain with the parent command. The use of supported and supporting relationships appears to be the most effective. The supporting commander retains the ability to properly employ and care for his subordinates. The supported commander needs only to provide guidance in the effect he desires in order to achieve success. The goal, then, is to just tell the participating units what effect is needed and let them figure out how to achieve that effect.

Special Forces liaisons are still important but manning the SFLE & SOCCE is difficult due to the OPTEMPO. The solution that appears to work best is that Special Forces leaders must

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<sup>44</sup>LTC Samuel L Ashley and MAJ Scott McGliesh, "Operation Al Hasn: A Strategic Success, Planning And Executing A Full Spectrum Operation In The Afghan Theater Today," via email correspondence January-March 2007.

‘wear two hats’ and share the responsibilities of both operations as well as liaising with adjacent general purpose forces.

The Joint and Army doctrine is sound and is currently being effectively applied in a descriptive manner. This descriptive application is assisting commanders in focusing on the challenges of irregular warfare and the effects necessary to win.

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